

Minutes of the Meeting of the Delta Smelt Working Group
January 13, 2005 at USFWS

Attending: Zach Hymanson (CBDA), Gonzalo Castillo (USFWS), Matt Nobriga (CDWR), Bruce Herbold (USEPA), Jim White (CDFG), Mike Chotkowski (USBR), Mike Dege (CDFG), Ted Sommer (CDWR), Kevin Fleming (CDFG), Ryan Olah (USFWS), and Victoria Poage (USFWS, convener and scribe)

Guest: Roger Guinee (USFWS)

Original Agenda:

1. WOMT request for discussion of Port Chicago proposal
2. FMWT index for delta smelt
3. Update on proposed studies
4. DSRAM presentation for Asilomar
5. VAMP shoulders

Handouts:

1. Port Chicago documents (Victoria Poage, via e-mail)
2. Delta Smelt Management Brief (Ted Sommer)

Minutes of Meeting

Roger Guinee brought the group a request from the Water Operations Management Team (WOMT) to review and comment on a proposal to potentially modify the Port Chicago outflow standard. The proposal includes a draft letter to the SWRCB, background information on the standard, and a draft decision tree. In particular, the group was asked to comment on the proposal to implement a "functional equivalent" of the standard, e.g., instead of implementing 29,200 cfs for the required number of days, implement 25,000 cfs for a greater number of days, reduce the current month's requirement and increase subsequent months' requirement, or offsetting reduced outflow in other ways. The group was unable to give an opinion with regard to what effect the proposed might do to/for delta smelt, but noted:

- The post-1981 change in the relationship of delta smelt abundance to X2;
- Concern is high because of poor FMWT numbers;
- Salvage is climbing;
- Flow relationships/mechanisms must be better understood;
- The importance of maintaining the mean vs. maintaining variability, if the proposed changes are within the current scope of variability;
- The timing of the changes may be important;
- Water quality may not be a factor, as Pt Chicago would be triggered at a time when water quality in the Delta is about as good as it gets (low salinity); short

term changes in outflow would not cause salinity in the Delta to increase to problem levels;

- Any “saved” water could become an EWA asset;
- There is no known biological basis for assuming equivalent habitat conditions would result from implementing “more” days at 25,000 cfs vs. implementing the currently-required number of days at 29,200 cfs;
- The current Vernalis flow as a component of overall Delta outflow doesn’t seem to be a good indicator for where adults (smelt and other species) go to spawn (historically, Vernalis flow may have been a better indicator).

The consensus message that the group wished to pass on to the WOMT was that (1) we have a very high level of concern for delta smelt this year because of their record low FMWT, and (2) we can’t say what the effect of the proposed Port Chicago changes would be. Ryan Olah will bring the message to WOMT on January 18. Any comments the group has on the Port Chicago decision tree should go to Bruce Herbold. The goal is to find alternatives that the management agencies can live with.

Ted Sommer led off the discussion of the abysmal 2004 FMWT index by noting that DWR’s management is very concerned with the apparent low abundance of delta smelt, despite recent conservation efforts, and has requested that Ted and Matt prepare a brief outlining the problem, its possible causes, and recommendations for further studies. The discussion followed the order of the Management Brief handout, with the group providing feedback on several points. The group agreed that a special meeting of the EET is appropriate, and will organize an open session at the upcoming IEP workshop at Asilomar. Kevin will work with Ted to show that the situation is not really surprising, given the appropriate context, and will tie the brief to the DSRAM.

Routine Delta monitoring will proceed as usual in 2005, however, the IEP budget is smaller than it has been in the past. USBR will not be fully funding the South Delta hydrologic studies. This work provides the foundation for other important work in the Delta, so this represents a loss not only to Mike C. but to other researchers as well. The DFG Spring Kodiak Trawl survey is scheduled to begin the week of January 24, with the pilot larval study beginning the week of January 31.

Bruce Herbold was not prepared to discuss his presentation for Asilomar on the DSRAM.

Any implementation of pre- or post-VAMP shoulders in 2005 will follow the DSRAM process. It was asked whether the group would favor a pulse flow on the San Joaquin River as part of a shoulder, e.g., in addition to the usual export curtailment. Victoria responded that a pulse flow shouldn’t be ruled out, but that the water might be hard to come by. Zach asked about recommendations regarding the Head of Old River barrier; FWS has held some internal discussions to manage expectations with regard to the need to remove the barrier promptly at the end of the VAMP period, but so far no one has discussed the possibility of recommending that the HORB not be installed at all. However, given that the likelihood of encountering larvae in the south Delta is small, if any larvae are seen in routine surveys then concern would be high. With this in mind, the

group decided to meet again in March, before the installation of the HORB, for further discussion. Meanwhile, Victoria and Gonzalo will collaborate on a write-up of the potential implementation of VAMP shoulders in 2005.

Next planned meeting: Thursday, March 10, 9:30 am-12:30 pm in the Delta Room at USFWS; a laptop and a projector will be on hand. We will make arrangements for lunch. Anyone who brings data, figures, or other materials for discussion is asked to bring a sufficient number of paper copies for the entire group (8-10) or to provide the material in advance via e-mail or in person via electronic means.

Submitted,
VLP